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ABSTRACT

This newsletter issue is devoted entirely to the goals and achievements of Project Estrella (Encourage Students through Technology To Reach High Expectations in Learning, Lifeskills, and Achievement), one of six migrant education technology projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education. "ESTRELLA Connects for Learning" describes the use of technology and mentors to connect migrant students in Montana, New York, and Illinois with their home school districts in Texas. Strengths of the program include excellent planning and management, experience from pilot technology projects, and partnerships with NovaNET educational consultants. Sidebars give student comments and ESTRELLA receiving sites by state. "Online All the Time--Cyber Mentors in Action" describes the online mentors from the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas, who work with migrant students to facilitate their enrollment in college. "Finds from Frank--Resource Update" notes resources on the Migrant Education Technology and Curriculum Clearinghouse Web site and other Web-based resources for students and teachers. "Images Strengthen Writing in ESTRELLA" reports on ESTRELLA's involvement with the Polaroid Education Program, which teaches visual learning strategies to stimulate effective written and spoken communication. "Update: Projects Make Progress" notes InTIME, SERVE, MECHA, OVEC, and SYNERGY project activities and trainings. Contact information is given for all six Migrant Education Technology Projects. (SAS)

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LINKING_LEARNING

Summer 1998

MIGRANT EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS

"For more than eleven years, the Polaroid Education Program has existed as a partnership involving Polaroid Corporation, a group of visionary consultants committed to visual learning, and the education community at large. Through this unique partnership, nearly 700,000 educators have been trained in the conscious integration of visual learning strategies that capitalize on students' natural propensity to learn by seeing. Mobile migrant students face unique challenges when it comes to learning. As a business partner in Project ESTRELLA, the Program contributes proven visual learning methods and appropriate technology to empower these students, their teachers, and their families."

Mark Zimmerman, Program Coordinator, Polaroid Education Program

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★ESTRELLA Connects for Learning

This spring as the summer migration season approached, some 35 families in Texas' Rio Grande Valley looked forward to a special night—the night when students and their parents would receive state-of-the-art Toshiba laptop computers, and become full participants in Estrella. The laptops enable Estrella students to complete required secondary coursework, prepare for the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), and stay on track for high school graduation even as they migrate north for work in the fields. Family members can use the laptops for ESL and other training. And everyone can stay connected through E-mail.

Human connections are a central factor of Estrella, reinforcing the leading-edge technology component. The original project proposal read, "We will always be dedicated to continuity. We will use technology to the maximum extent, but we will never underestimate the value of human contact. We must remember that while technology is the medium, the vision is still to have content and instruction that is of high quality." Steering Committee Member and Prime Partner Angela Branz-Spall, Montana Department of Education, made these remarks in 1996, and they still reflect a belief that people make technology an effective learning tool.

"With these laptops, no matter where you are, whether in Texas or up north this summer, you'll always be able to keep up with your studies and earn credit toward graduation." Estrella Project Director Brenda Pessin, of the Illinois Migrant Council, made this statement as she encouraged eleven students from seven families at a La Joya School District laptop "roll-out" session in May. Brenda and other project staff,

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Mrs. Elida Garcia, left, watches as Benjamin Macías instructs ESTRELLA students Liliana and Mariela Garcia. Brother Cleofas watches too.

"Project ESTRELLA has saved me time by giving me the opportunity to move ahead in my studies. Because of the ate this spring."

Claudio Fuentes, Estrella student from Eagle Pass ISD

along with teachers and migrant workers from the area, were present to distribute laptops and begin the initial training, under the direction of Ben Macías, Interstate Student Coordinator. Ben is available to parents and students 24 hours a day via phone and beeper. Summer school teachers in receiving states have been trained in online coursework, as well as in uses of the Internet and visual learning. Everyone stays in close touch electronically, with enough travel to establish personal relationships.

Estrella keeps students connected in another way. Each migrant participant is matched with a cyber mentor—a college student who provides information and encouragement online. (See page 4).

Participating students were selected based on several criteria, including interest in credit accrual, parental support, travel pattern to Illinois, Montana or New York, phone access, and ability to be a self-advocate. Decisions on course selection and authorization for online work comes from high school counselors in the participating Texas school districts of Weslaco, PSJA (Pharr-San Juan-Alamo), La Joya, and Eagle Pass.

Estrella students agree to work 10 hours a week; time spent on courses or online with their cyber mentors counts. Parents agree to help the student find quiet space for work. Given the difficult living conditions for migrant families and the long hours spent in the fields by parents and older children, both of these commitments are substantial, and reflect a strong desire for the greater opportunities and choices that come with education.

One of six Department of Education funded Migrant Education Technology Projects, Estrella reflects unusual strengths in planning and management. One reason is that the Prime Partners from Illinois, Montana, New York and Texas have worked together for many years on migrant projects, understand the differences in state approaches and methods, and know how to resolve problems. (All of the Estrella students are home-based in Texas, which has the second largest state population of migrant students, identifying over 115,000 in 1996-1997, and sending students to 42 states.)

A second source of strength comes from experience. Estrella builds upon pilot projects between Texas and Montana called "Lone Star to Big Sky," which explored many of the issues around achieving continuity in education through technology. For example, the parent-student contract regarding care and protection of the laptops reflects pilot project findings. Established vendor contacts and strong technical capability enabled Estrella to acquire machines defined exactly as needed, obtain a cost reduction at each successive purchase, and secure reasonably-priced insurance for each machine.

ESTRELLA

technology for migrant student achievement

"We are finally at a place where the technology makes all this possible," observed Project Director Brenda Pessin, referring to Estrella's unique combination of precise focus on coursework to ensure high school graduation, and broad geographic operation. The most recent purchases are 166 Mhz Toshiba notebooks with modems and CD-ROM drives that come bundled with Windows 95, Office Pro 97, Microsoft Encarta Deluxe 98, and Norton Anti-Virus 4.0. They are packaged with shoulder bags specially designed for use by students (extra padding but no room to stick your lunch in).

Estrella's partnership with NovaNET makes the online coursework possible. NovaNET currently houses about 10,000 lessons, and serves learners and educators in over 500 sites in 30 states. NovaNET educational consultants are available 12 hours a day to answer questions or help students understand lessons. All the participating Texas school districts are active NovaNET users. Summer school teachers in receiving states are also trained on NovaNET.

People and technology have joined forces in Estrella, to change the lives of migrant students. Susan Duron, Project Evaluator and long-time migrant education consultant, summed up the pride and enthusiasm of the Estrella Steering Committee at a May meeting with these words: "For a long time it has seemed that the students in this country who need the most help had the least resources. Perhaps we are starting to get our priorities right."

Estrella – Encouraging Students through Technology to Reach High Expectations in Learning, Lifeskills, and Achievement.

ESTRELLA SITES IN RECEIVING STATES

Illinois: Champaign, Hoopeston, Joliet, Mendota, Princeville, Springfield
Montana: Fromberg, Hysham, Sidney
New York: Herkimer, New Paltz

"I think this is a really nice project. I want to finish my World History so I don't have to take it in Texas. I can work as fast or slow as I want. That makes it easier. I hope I can finish before I go back. I probably won't have to take P.E. when I get back. After carrying my books and papers and the computer around on my bike I am getting stronger. My whole body is getting a workout."

Juan Gomez, Estrella student from La Joya ISD

"Project ESTRELLA has given me a preview of next year's subjects, and it's given me a jump start on them, boosted confidence in my academic ability, and I can earn credit so I won't have to repeat classes."

Azalia Vargas, Estrella student from La Joya ISD

"The program has helped teach me patience to finish my projects."

Ivette Vargas, Estrella student from La Joya ISD

Online all the Time – Cyber Mentors in Action

Going to college can seem as impossible as going to the moon for a migrant student. Not knowing anything about college life, and not having information about how to apply, can be as limiting as lack of money for students whose families have little or no secondary education.

To combat this obstacle to college enrollment, Estrella has enlisted cyber mentors – 24 students from the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) in San Antonio, Texas. These cyber mentors are matched with Estrella students and provide online encouragement, information, and role models.

UIW students were a natural choice. The University has a strong service orientation; UIW students must complete a minimum of 45 hours of community service in order to graduate, and 30 of those hours must be with one group or agency. According to Bob Lynch, Estrella Prime Partner and Director of the BOCES Geneso Migrant Center (BGMC), "The University seems to pre-select students who want to do service, and then UIW instills this ethic deep into the kids." Lynch adds that there has been no problem recruiting cyber mentors, and no extra incentives were necessary. In fact, it's been easier to sign up mentors than to identify mentees, track them to a summer location and get them online, given the realities of project start-up. Establishing and maintaining a connection between the college student and the migrant secondary student is a major project goal.

The enthusiasm of the cyber mentors is contagious. At a May training session, as other UIW students were packing and leaving the campus, 14 cyber mentors got together for a final pre-summer effort. Sitting back to back in straight chairs and pretending to type on imaginary keyboards, Laura Moreno and J.R. Peña played out a typical mentor-mentee conversation, as others called out questions and suggestions. Everyone was eager to connect with their mentees, and keep them on track toward college.

Laura Moreno and Yesenia Ortiz practice cyber dialogue.

Yesenia Ortíz, a UIW senior, acts as Program Assistant for Estrella. Yesenia has helped spread the word about mentoring and worked with training. (BGMC provided the initial training and developed a cyber-mentoring guidebook.) "Many of the cyber mentors are from the Rio Grande Valley or Eagle Pass, and a few are students who grew up in migrant families," says Yesenia. "And they are all people who want to help. Many UIW students complete their required hours of service, but keep on volunteering."

"Being a mentor has been a very exciting experience...These students are where I was four, five years ago and I know how difficult it was for me to wake up in the morning, sit and pay attention in class and not feel rewarded for my work. Now that I am in college I see my reward...Being a mentor has made me realize that we should take advantage of the opportunities life offers. I expect to continue mentoring, because I know that a lot of young adults need someone to encourage them. They have the potential to succeed, they may just not have the motivation and that is what I expect to instill in them."

Blanca Monreal, University of the Incarnate Word

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Yesenia, in addition to signing-up students and training them, stays in touch with both mentors and mentees. She is supported by the Estrella Interstate Student Coordinator, Benjamín Macías, who monitors online contacts and helps solve technology problems.

Much of the cyber mentor training focused on trying to anticipate situations and devise responses. Lots of role-playing, such as "What would you do if the student said she was discouraged?" helped prepare the mentors to respond actively. Mentors are trained in locating resources, online and elsewhere, particularly materials regarding college admission and selection, careers, and life skills. Mentors are also instructed on privacy issues and situations that might require intervention.

Brenda Pessin, Estrella Director, underscores the views of her migrant education colleagues. "Mentors represent a critical link for migrant youth between their current reality and their potential for a college education. Mentors contribute both the promise of a better life and a reason to keep struggling with work and school. They have the ability to encourage their mentees to stay with a difficult task even when the end seems a long way off."

Project MECHA, a Migrant Education Technology Grant Project managed by Barry University in Miami, Florida, incorporates a technique similar to Estrella. MECHA calls their college student coaches cyber counselors. MECHA cyber counselors are assigned to one of the MECHA teachers. (MECHA operates on a classroom basis.) The MECHA agreement is for cyber counselors to spend one hour a week online with the students assigned to a specific teacher. Initial response has been below the expected levels, so in the fall MECHA will try to attract cyber counselors as part of course assignments at Barry. Another possibility is enlisting students from a Florida Community College in the Homestead area, where more students will be familiar with the challenges facing migrant students.

(Note: A Mentoring Online course is available at http://www.wmc.edu/acad/rfts/rfts.htm. Click on lessons.)

Finds from Frank--Resource Update

Our Migrant Education Technology and Curriculum Clearinghouse has been steadily growing. We've moved to a site promising the fastest and most reliable service—http://lone-eagles.com/migrant.htm. The range of resources covers Mexico, Central and South America. The quality of resources exceeds everyone's expectations! A section on national mentoring programs and resources has been added to the K-12 curriculum in Spanish section (http://lone-eagles.com/migcurr.htm). Museums, Spanish search engines and cultural sites can be found at http://lone-eagles.com/miglang.htm.

A short tutorial on translating any web page, text or email message to and from five languages is available on the Clearinghouse Homepage, along with a tutorial on creating web-based electronic portfolios (written by students from the Edgecumb Boarding School in Sitka, Alaska.)

All current news at the CNN site can be read in Spanish. Watch for the "En Espanol" button on the left of the screen at http://www.cnn.com.

Coming soon – a 12 part Youth Entrepreneurship curriculum (in Spanish) from the Kauffman Foundation. Free resources as well. Watch for this at http://www.emkf.org.

Project-based learning is the best way to engage students in purposeful learning via the Internet. Webquests are a structured model for project-based learning; ready for busy teachers to "plug and play." http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html.

To get busy teachers started on the Internet, try a new Teacher's Guide to the Internet with Web Tours and Best-of-the-Best K12 resource hotlinks. Beginner's training too. http://lone-eagles.com/guide.htm. Printed copies available.

Send along any good Spanish online curriculum web addresses so we can incorporate them into our clearinghouse.

—Frank Odasz, Frank@lone-eagles.com

Images Strengthen Writing in ★ESTRELLA

"In Estrella, visual learning strategies will serve to stimulate effective communication in all of its forms: the written word, the spoken word, and images. These images, produced by students and teachers, will also serve to interpret coursework and document academic progress. Visual learning strategies will be implemented using Polaroid instant cameras and film; images will be digitized via Polaroid PhotoMax image scanners for use in a variety of computer based applications."

Mark Zimmerman, Project Coordinator for the Polaroid Education Program (PEP), offers this nutshell description of the visual learning project. The effort to strengthen students' communications skills, particularly writing, is underway this summer at Estrella sites in Illinois, Montana and New York. As an Estrella business partner, Mark works closely with Jeri Kinser, Instructional Technology Specialist, and Juli Reiten, a professional photographer, to develop materials, train educators, and bring an understanding of visual learning to bear on students' powers of communication. At the end of the summer, experts in visual learning will join with Estrella staff to review the experience and make improvements for the next cycle.

Teaching materials walk students through six techniques: explore, record, communicate, express, motivate, and imagine. Camera and scanner activities for each mode help students translate their instinct for visual learning into stronger, sharper language. Thus, the six modes of visual learning strengthen authentic writing.

Visual learning strategies are well understood, but not widely used as a basis for teaching writing and speaking skills. As PEP materials point out, "Most educators can readily identify the elements or conditions that make for ineffective or passive written communication. They can also identify the techniques that can help a student's writing become more powerful or active. In the world of photographic image making, there is a parallel set of techniques. Mastering these techniques, like mastering the skills of powerful writing, can be a life's work, but learning and applying these techniques is relatively easy."

Jeri Kinser and Juli Reiten agree that the fact of moving around the country gives migrant students special opportunities to develop their visual muscles to identify strong images, contrast, changes in mood and content, and other elements of eloquent images. Images and words will combine in a newsletter that will connect Estrella students and families. Jeri and Juli are developing the newsletter as an electronic journal, and students are already competing to name the publication, which will eventually be the first newsletter on the Internet published by migrant students. Relying on active images and strong writing, migrant students will open their experience to thousands around the world.

Visual Learning

In addition to its work with Estrella, the Polaroid Education Program is allied with the National Writing Project (NWP), and will directly engage about 20 NWP teachers of migrant students around the country to help them observe, question and analyze their own classroom efforts on behalf of migrant students. Polaroid Education Program is active in many non-migrant projects, and is seeking business partnerships with state, federal or foundation projects. If you are interested in exploring a partnership with Polaroid Education Program, contact Mark Zimmerman, Program Coordinator, Polaroid Education Program, by phone at (801) 568-1630 or online at roombuildr@AOL.COM (Note to Migrant Education Technology Projects: Plans are underway to consider this opportunity for your projects at the September meeting.)

-UPDATE- Projects Make Progress

- Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) has completed training for families at six migrant summer school sites. The training helps parents and children use television and other resources to build reading and writing skills. In the fall, OPB will train teachers on these same elements.
- University of Oregon training for electronic notetaking is complete and ready to go in the fall. Trained notetakers in classrooms will assist students by translation and coaching.
- InTIME is working with the Northwest Evaluation Association to develop a Spanish item bank to assess student progress relative to Oregon Standards at grades 4, 6, 7 and 9.

- The Instructional Support Team concept proved strong as farmworker families from Lee and Collier counties moved into the Florida panhandle, and then on to North and South Carolina. Following intensive training for instructors in Tampa, SERVE personnel moved north as the families traveled. Daytime activities for students and evening activities for adults were offered at Garguilo House, a migrant dwelling in Tallahassee made available by SERVE's grower partner, Gargiulo, Inc.
- Some miles west of Tallahassee, SERVE expanded and enhanced the June Migrant Summer School at Gretna, Florida, which this year offered access to a full computer lab. Digital camera projects developed by SERVE were especially involving for the students.
- AmericaCorps volunteers and Anchor School partner staff kept both facilities lively despite record heat. In July, SERVE moved once again, to South Carolina and North Carolina, hoping to reunite with families from the Gretna area and enlist new families.

- Like all projects, MECHA is readjusting based on year one experience, streamlining its direction and training focus. Project Director Janie Greenleaf and Cip Garza are supervising the MECHA teachers at six summer school sites. Many MECHA students did not travel as expected, or traveled to new locations. Communication with traveling students is going well, with only a few problems caused by inadequate phone connections.
- Frank Odasz returns to MECHA for teacher training on August 10-14. MECHA is ready for a productive and focused Year Two.

- Summer training with families and teachers is well underway at schools and homes around the OVEC region. Community sites and the OVEC mobile lab extend the operation and bring technology to more families.
- In anticipation of project expansion in the coming year, OVEC leaders are identifying Kentucky areas with substantial migrant populations, and discussing the needs and interest of these communities in participating in the grant-funded work.
- OVEC invites sister projects and others to visit its website—migrant.org. Browse through the free section and print guides in English and Spanish. You will also find a free interactive CD listed; this introduces basic English language skills. OVEC is happy to train anyone on how to create similar CDs using PowerPoint.

- SYNERGY conducted extensive training on how to use Curriculum Designer, a software program that enables instructors to define lesson content that complies with "sending" state requirements, but appears seamless to the child. Representatives from Donna and Weslaco school districts in Texas and Polk school district in Florida were able to be part of this training.
- Internet resources are more useful to SYNERGY teachers after two days of instruction by Frank Odasz. The Project Webmaster and technology support staff from Van Buren school district joined in, so everyone is more conversant with practical questions of web use. Much of Frank's course was given at the same time as a statewide training session, and many non-SYNERGY teachers joined in.

Migrant Education Technology Projects

Anchor School

The Anchor School Project, providing educational continuity for selected students and families migrating from Lee and Collier counties in Florida up the Eastern Seaboard.

Dr. Jean Williams
SERVE, Inc.
(336) 334-4667 Phone
(336) 334-4671 Fax
jwilliam@serve.org
serve.org/anchorschool

OVEC

The Ohio Valley Education Cooperative Project, using technology to meet the needs of K-12 students, drop-outs and families migrating in and out Kentucky. This website includes many resources and materials you can obtain free!

Mr. Michael Abell
Ohio Valley Education Cooperative
(502) 647-3533 Phone
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migrant.org

ESTRELLA

Maintaining continuity in education for secondary students home based in Texas who migrate to Illinois, Montana and Texas. Laptop computers and people keep students tracking toward high school graduation.

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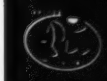

InTIME

Serving Oregon's 22,000+ K-12 migrant students and their families through public television, electronic assessment and technology-integrated learning.

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www.intime.k12.or.us/

MECHA

MECHA

M E C H A, supporting selected students and families migrating north from Dade County, Florida, via WebTV.

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SYNERGY

Meeting the needs of elementary migrant students moving from Texas and Florida into Michigan.

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Linking_Learning updates the education community and others regarding six projects funded by the Department of Education. These projects test the utility of technology to improve learning opportunities and life choices for students in migrant labor families.

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